

The Oceanic Circle

The bane of our life is our exclusive provincialism, whereas my province must be co-extensive with the Indian boundary so that ultimately it extends to the boundary of the earth. Else it perishes - Mahatma Gandhi, September 1947

The truth never dies but is made to live as a beggar: Yiddish proverb

Introduction:

Three things occupied Mahatma Gandhi all his life: God, truth, and Ahimsa. He did not see them in different compartments but as threads in the fabric of human life. A life spent in pursuit of truth is a philosophical life. His efforts towards social and political reform do not subtract from his deeply thoughtful character. Gandhi drew his strength from the most noble qualities of ordinary people. He spoke to them in the language of their cherished symbols, legends and poets – and it was they, not any political leaders who perceived him as their Mahatma. This, combined with his deep sense of human dignity, constituted his *sthithprajna*, or calmness of soul.

Gandhi was a wise man. I would like to try and understand his wisdom. My effort relies a great deal on the scholarship of other people. The mistakes are mine alone.

Gandhi possessed a powerful impulse toward confronting injustice and social evils. He also saw the struggle between good and evil as unfolding in every soul – not as a combat between nations and communities. If ours is ‘the age of the intellectual cultivation of political hatreds’, Gandhi stood in direct opposition to this mode of thinking. If politics is defined as ‘the friend-enemy relation’, Gandhi defined it as founded on friendship and dialogue. If politics are perceived as deceitful by definition, Gandhi insisted on truthful conduct in politics no less than in other spheres of life. An entire tradition of Western political thought, including Machiavelli, Hobbes, French Jacobinism, Carl Schmitt and Lenin, believed the state to be grounded on originary violence; but Gandhi believed such ideologies and such states were doomed to extinction.

Gandhi’s ideas combined moral, theological and political elements. He did not view life as a material exile of the soul; rather as an opportunity to serve people. It could be said of him that he found his soul in those who suffered the misfortunes of history. This is why he could say of his first meeting with the peasants of Champaran in 1917, a meeting which came after strenuous effort; that the simple rural folk received him as if they were his age-long friends: *it is no exaggeration, but the literal truth, to say that in this meeting with the peasants I was face to face with God, Ahimsa, and Truth.*

There are four issues that concern me here: the problem of anti-colonial strategy in a culturally heterogeneous society; a commitment to truth which is not contaminated by religious or national boundaries; the opaque nature of evil and its incompatibility with the idea of a benevolent God; and the human capacity to turn conscience against itself.

The Sovereignty of Good

In September 1947, soon after his famous Calcutta fast for communal harmony, Gandhi made the following observation: *Good is self-existent, evil is not. It is like a parasite living in and around good. It will die of itself when the support that good gives it is withdrawn.*

This a profound speculation on moral philosophy. We may combine it with his observation in Hind Swaraj: *The force of love is the same as the force of the truth or soul. We have evidence of its working at every step. The universe would disappear without the existence of that force.* He had no great respect for history, which was the story of rupture; rather he wanted to restore to lived time the legitimacy of real friendship, without which society would have ended long ago.

In Platonic philosophy, the closest icon of the Good is the sun. we cannot look at it directly, but the sun makes sight possible; along with the powers of intelligent discrimination. We cannot contemplate the heterogeneity of the world without the light of the sun. A silent vision of the good comes *before* contemplation. However, in the first book of the Bible, it is God who says 'let there be light' and *sees* that it is good. And the same is repeated for all the things of creation. The vision of goodness is God's, and it comes *after* He has created the world.

Thus, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, goodness is recorded in an act of writing; and is relative to the will of God, who creates the cosmos. In the Platonic tradition, the cosmos is eternal, and it is good. Vision and hearing are sufficient for us to witness goodness.

Gandhi's intuition about self-generative goodness was spoken with deep conviction; as was his observation that evil is a parasite which feeds upon the Good. I do not know how he arrived at this conviction; but others have had similar thoughts. Even in the prophetic tradition, evil is seen as privation, (*abhaav*) a lack or loss of good, rather than something with a life of its own. A similar comment was made by Hannah Arendt in 1963, when she wrote that evil is without depth; it is only extreme. Only the good has depth; but human evil can '*lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface.*' But it is true that in the early Abrahamic tradition, some Christian sects believed evil to hold an autonomous status, engaged in a perpetual struggle with God.

Must there be an obstacle between these differing views of good and evil? No, since the prophetic traditions also tell us that the world is good. All metaphysical traditions religious or not, revere the light: the prophets are those who catch glimpses of the light of goodness. Again, pride (*ahankara*), tyranny and the will to power are seen as the root of evil across the centuries. Problems arise with the demand for unquestioning obedience to dogma. This is why in a discussion with journalists in 1936, Gandhi said: *I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to Divine revelation. And above all, 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.' But you must not misunderstand my position. I believe in Faith also, in things where Reason has no place e.g., the existence of God* (CWMG, vol 64 p 71)

The Biblical citation about 'the spirit giving life' is revealing, for it speaks to the possibility of overcoming evil. There was a difference between evil and the evil-doer;

hence there was always a potential for us to correct ourselves. For Gandhi, the holy spirit was the same as the inner voice, the conscience, which all of us possessed. This was why he placed such importance on reaching the mind through the heart.

Without this appeal to both conscience and reason, we risk ethical fragmentation. When blind faith in a 'national' God becomes the defining belief of a so-called chosen people, it pushes us towards spiritual apartheid. When theology is reduced to orthodoxy, and the believers are kept as armies for political gain; we are on the brink of violence in God's name. What does all this have to do with our theme? Three things:

one, is uniformity of belief desirable or possible in a political system?

two, is nation-worship compatible with religion; or is it a form of atheism?

three, can political leaders truthfully claim to speak on God's behalf?

Civil religion and the theological-political problem

This is the theological/political problem: should we be ruled by divine guidance or by unaided human reason? The problem is easily stated: if we are to be ruled by divine wisdom, we must accept that no guidance comes directly from God. As Gandhi observed, holy scriptures come to us via a process of double distillation; first through the prophets, and then through their disciples. Hence, we must rely upon our reason to discriminate between various interpretations of the divine message.

If we rely upon human reason alone, we are obliged to conduct a dialogue about the Good. How may we do this? Montesquieu side-stepped the problem by saying the issue of religion versus atheism was less important than the utility of religion, which was necessary to control popular passions. The same idea was developed by Rousseau in his *The Social Contract*, which contains a chapter on civil religion, where he says legislators should place their recommendations in the mouth of God, because people are then more likely to believe them. This is a step towards the co-option of religion by politics.

I recently came across the writing of the contemporary philosopher William Desmond, who uses the concept of 'the between' as to understand the relation of religion to philosophy, the empirical to the transcendent, intuition to analysis, and of dialogue to solitary reflection. Plato described humans as neither gods nor beasts, but somewhere between the two; and the same can be said of philosophy. I think this is the best way to understand Gandhi: he accepted the variety of belief systems; and was negotiating a path to swaraj whereby the potential for conflict could be reduced. The link between religion and politics was a reference to an ethics of public activism. Religion was a source of morality and wisdom; politics was the sphere of social and political responsibility. On the term *Rama-Rajya* too, he was crystal clear:

I must repeat for the thousandth time that Ramanama is one of the many names for God. The same prayer meetings have recitations from the Koran and the Zend Avesta. Devout Muslims... have never objected to the chant of Ramanama.

Ramanama is not an idle chant. It is conceived as a mode of addressing the all-pervasive God known to me, as to millions of Hindus, by the familiar name of Ramanama. 'Nama' at the end of Rama is the most significant part. It means the 'nama' without the Rama of history.... As to the use of the phrase 'Rama-Rajya', why should it offend after my having defined its meaning many times? It is a convenient and expressive phrase, the meaning of which no alternative can so fully express to millions. When I... address predominantly Muslim audiences, I would express my meaning to them by calling it Khudai Raj, while to a Christian audience I would describe it as the Kingdom of God on earth. Any other mode would, for me, be self-suppression and hypocrisy.' (CWMG v 85, p 135)

For Gandhi the enforcement of a uniform civil religion was both hypocritical and impossible. The transformation of popular belief in the successor states of the British Empire has shown the dangers of this utilitarian approach to religion. Today religion has been overtaken by ideology; and for some of us, is a means of waging political warfare. The greatest enemies of religion are to be found amongst its own followers.

Once, in the face of hostile sloganeering (*Gandhi-vaad murdabad*) in Bengal in February 1940, Gandhi remarked, *"I love to hear the words 'Down with Gandhism'. An 'ism' deserves to be destroyed. It is a useless thing. the real thing is non-violence. It is immortal. It is enough for me if it remains alive. I am eager to see Gandhism wiped out at an earlier date... I have never dreamt of establishing any sect. If any sect is established in my name after my death my soul would cry out in anguish"* Gandhi never suggested a doctrine of an imaginary future that required evil deeds to be done in the present. The present and future were fused together, only virtuous deeds in the present would contribute to the world's betterment. This concept of time focusses on presence; rather than transience.

Gandhi's theological creativity, and the problem of evil

The questions: how should we live? What is good and what is sinful? are common to all communities, even if the answers are different. Theories of evil are as rich as those of the origin of the world. The effort to explain evil while retaining faith in God's goodness is called *theodicy*. Some scholars describe all religions as failed theodicies. Hegel claimed his philosophy to be a theodicy: 'a justification of the ways of God' in human history. But the history of the past century and the genocidal events unfolding to this day make it difficult to accept Hegel's theodicy. Max Weber considered the *karma* doctrine the most consistent theodicy, which made our ill-fortune dependent upon past lives, all of which transpired in 'beginningless time'. Retributive justice was placed in creation.

In my view, the problem is not soluble. We humans yearn to understand life and the world. But evil is inscrutable, it overpowers explanations; no theodicy can satisfy our thirst for an explanation for human cruelty and useless suffering. God's power is equally inscrutable: infinite space and eternal time remain beyond our grasp. God is the name of the everlasting mystery of our origins and our natures. No telescopes can solve it.

Leszek Kołakowski (1927-2009) wrote about this theme thus: *to reject the sacred is to reject our own limits. It is also to reject the idea of evil, for the sacred reveals itself through sin, imperfection, and evil; and evil, in turn, can be identified only through the sacred.* To say that evil is a result of pure chance is to say that there is no evil; and therefore, that we have no need of a moral capacity which is already there; imposed on us whether we will it or not. If we believe that society can be improved, it follows that there must always be people who think of the price paid for every step of progress. He concludes: *The order of the sacred is also a sensitivity to evil.* It is less a matter of belief in God, and more a matter of self-imposed limits to speech and action.

If there is no virtue, there is no law, because everything is permitted. And if everything is permitted, then it does not matter what we do or say. There is no difference between speech and silence. Slavery is freedom, ignorance is knowledge, sophistry is wisdom.

We need a sanctuary of goodness and courage. In Gandhi's case, I would say that his personal sanctuary was his *sthithprajna*; and for social behaviour, *swaraj*. Attaining it requires control of the will and emotions. This approach is based on the assumption that while God, truth, and goodness are the same; falsehood is a rupture in truth, and evil is a rupture in goodness. This is why good is self-existent, evil is not. Just as Brahman does not exist in time, but time is within it; so also, the light contains the darkness. It is for us to use our sight and insight to perceive it.

That which we call sacred is the discovery and acceptance of our limits; and this is precisely the sense of good and evil which Gandhi wrestled with all his life.

Gandhi tried to resolve the dilemma by focussing on social reform on a daily basis (*rachnatmak karyakram*, or constructive work) and confronting the injustice of colonialism and violence. He knew that violence has a momentum which can overpower our self-control. He attempted to develop the alternative momentum of self-discipline and the fellowship of satyagrahis. He was firm in his determination to prevent violence from poisoning India's liberation. And he undertook this task in the most violent decades in world history.

Truth, justice and ahimsa

Truth may mean different things to scientists, theologians and linguists, but none can dispose of it, even those who dismiss it as an illusion. In Indic knowledge, *dharma* combines truth, duty and virtue. Thus, for Gandhi, truth had an ethical function, combined with practical wisdom. Colour prejudice, unjust laws and colonial domination were errors in social practice: the simplest example of this reasoning is his refusal to accept the label 'coloured person' to be thrust upon him in a railway carriage reserved for whites. The denial of our common humanity was an untruth; as was the assertion that some of us are superior to others. The struggle against untouchability was a struggle for human unity, a *satyagraha*, an adherence to truth.

The centrality of *ahimsa*, and of courage in the face of violence, was not merely a political tactic. It contains the seed of a distinct moral philosophy. And it is the basis of the dialogue of the in-between zone; the foundation stone of a civil society which can overcome the difference between the natural goodness of the cosmos and the goodness of divine command. We have more control over our immediate practices than over our goals. Impure means, the worst of which was to do violence to others, would poison our goals. Gandhi seemed to assume a homogeneity in religious communities (as in his support for the Khilafat movement); but he was steadfast in his belief in the autonomy of individual conscience.

His evidence to the Hunter Commission of Inquiry into the Jallianwala Bagh massacre shows the importance of non-violence as a means of ensuring that differing opinions did not lead to the disintegration of popular resistance. The evidence also shows his strong disapproval of executive power unchecked by the judiciary, and I would advise our lawyers and judges to read it carefully. (CWMG, v 16, p 408; January 1920).

Ahimsa was not a doctrine, but a reminder of our limits. The source of these limits may be called God or Creation, but it remains mysterious. What matters is that they are binding on all of us, not just some chosen few: this is the lesson of the hooligans of Calcutta in September 1947, who came to the fasting Mahatma and threw their weapons at his feet. No further proof is needed of the battle between good and evil taking place within every soul.

The problem of violence as original legitimation

In Machiavelli's *Discourses*, we find the following recommendation: *If one wishes that a sect or republic live long, one must bring it back frequently to its beginning*. In his view, all states were founded on terror. The recovery of ancient virtue required the re-imposition of the fear that had made men good at the beginning. This was true not because of their innocence but because they were gripped by fear. The lesson is clear and brutal: at the beginning there is not Love but Terror. Machiavelli's new teaching is based on this alleged insight; which anticipates Hobbes' doctrine of the state of nature.

Is violence at root an unspoken legitimating factor in the evolution of states? Most nation-states have evolved through a process of civil war; extreme violence often formed the backdrop to the establishment of constitutions. The prevalence of political assassination in the successor states of the British empire points to the stamina of ideologies of inclusion and exclusion. A research project on the history of mass violence has an entry on the Partition of India. The analysis contains the following assessment:

'Violence was not just a marginal phenomenon... It was on the contrary at the very heart of the event. Nor was it merely a consequence of Partition but rather the principal mechanism for creating the conditions for Partition. Violence constituted the moral instrument through which the tension between the pre-Partition local character of identity and its postcolonial territorial and national redefinition was negotiated. Violence operated as the link between the

community and its new national territory. That is precisely what gave it its organized and genocidal dimension as it was meant for control of social space so as to cleanse these territories from the presence of other religious communities.'

The history of our sub-continent shows us that the originary violence has become stabilised: we are forever at war. This is true globally as well. The legitimacy of the state is formally certified by the constitution, but informally it is sought not in the name of the law, but the violence of the origin. This is why our governments want us to remember the horrors of the origin. And that is why the horror is sought to be repeated, in art, as in the streets. We may now understand the truth of Gandhi's observation in Hind Swaraj: *that which is obtained by force can be retained only as long as the force lasts.*

Sthithprajna

Gandhi approached his conflict-ridden world as a *karmayogi* and a seeker after truth. He approached both the mind of the coloniser and the colonised by 'seeing from within.' This approach underlay his idea of 'heart unity' – something larger than and beyond political or religious doctrines. But to obtain a glimpse of the heart of the other person, means that we have the capacity to understand the emotions of others – a capacity that Gandhi insisted was intrinsically human.

Reason has its legitimate place for Gandhi, but a reason that knows its limits. That is why he insisted on the capacity of human beings to interpret scripture. If this is accepted, our responsibility is vast; given the existence of those who insist they can function as the executors of God's will. Such claims cannot be verified, and therefore we are obliged to question them.

We have no answer to the mysteries of eternal time and infinite space, so we give the mystery a name, as in God or Big Bang. This solves nothing. In his reply to the query Is God a Person or a Principle, his response was clear: the divine was inexpressible in language. However, as he wrote in response:

In my view, whether called Rama, Rahman, Ormuzd, God or Krishna, He is that Supreme Power that man is ever trying to find a name for. Man, though imperfect, strives after perfection and in so doing is caught up in the tides of thought... it is immaterial if some worship God as a Person and some others as a Great Power. Both are right, each in his own way. Nobody knows what is intrinsically right and nobody is likely ever to know. The ideal, to be an ideal, must forever remain out of reach. All the other forces are static, while God is the Life Force, immanent and at the same time transcendent.' (CWMG v 85, p 136. Emphasis mine)

Let us note the use of the word 'immanent' (antarnihit). In the same letter he referred to it thus: '*man, in praying, worships the Great Power residing within. Only he who knows this may pray. He who does not, need not pray.*' The divine impulse was *within* each soul, not external to it. Gandhi believed all humans to possess the impulse to goodness; it was the only means for Indians to evolve a decent civil society. The question of good, evil, truth

and falsehood remain central to human life. All religious traditions have grappled with these questions, and sages across cultures have provided us with their answers. If we can understand them despite the distances of time and space, this indicates that an ethical community built upon mutual respect is possible. It requires an effort to realise this. As he remarked in his prayer meeting in November 1947:

But when someone commits a crime anywhere, I feel I am the culprit. You too should feel the same. If I were to commit any crime you should also think that you too were guilty of it. Let us all merge in each other like drops of ocean. If the drops of ocean remain apart, they would dry up. But when they mingle together in the ocean, they can carry huge ships across their expanse. As with the ocean so with us. After all we also are an ocean of human beings. (CWMG v. 90, p133)

With this, we exit the domain of dogma and enter the space of the soul, which lies between philosophy and theology; theory and life; ordinary and extraordinary things. Even in the dogmatic traditions, the crack in the door through which the unbeliever is invited to become a convert demonstrates the reality of the in-between. Why? Because the believer could not make the invitation unless he believed in the possibility of conversion. What happens between the moment of invitation and the moment of thought? Why should we wish to convert anyone to an ideology or a faith? What is gained by establishing homogeneity or uniformity of belief? Why not improve ourselves before criticising others? What exactly do we want, domination or friendship?

What Gandhi called 'heart unity' was not a theory but the reality of friendly dialogue. If that reality were given stability, it would create the oceanic circle which in his words, would extend to the boundary of the earth. Without it, the world would perish.

This was Gandhi's *sthithprajna*, his serenity

Gandhi's community

In 1931, Havildar Chander Singh Garhwali refused to open fire on the Khudai Khidmatgar protestors in Peshawar, telling his English officers that it was not the duty of the Indian Army to shoot Indians. For which act of defiance he spent eleven years in jail

In 1937, the German businessman John Rabe, saved thousands of Chinese peoples' lives during the Nanking Massacre by the Japanese Army

In 1940, a Portuguese diplomat in occupied France named Aristides de Sousa Mendes defied his orders to give thousands of visas to Jews fleeing from the Nazis. He was dismissed from service and denied his pension by the Salazar government

In 1943 21-year-old student Sophie Scholl and her brother and friends of the White Rose group were executed by the Gestapo for denouncing Nazi war crimes

In 1942, Maharaja Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji of Nawanagar, adopted a thousand Polish orphans, and looked after them for the duration of the war. They called him their father.

In 1947, Comrade Gehal Singh, member of the CPI gave his life for helping thousands of Punjabi Muslims cross the border to Pakistan

Words of humanity, words of courage

What drives such people to stretch out a hand to strangers? To this question we have no answer. We can only repeat and remember their own words.

In 1937, the German priest Pastor Neimoller stood up in his church and declared: *No more are we prepared to remain silent at man's behest when God commands us to speak.* These words caused him to be sent to a concentration camp.

When the Polish social worker Irene Sendler was asked why, despite being tortured by the Gestapo, she rescued hundreds of Jewish children from the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, she said *she had no choice.*

The Serbian Protestant priest Tibor Varga looked after scores of Syrian refugees in 2015. When asked for a photograph in front of his church, he gestured to the refugee shelter and replied *this is my church.*

During the same time, Father Stratis Dimou, a Greek Orthodox priest founded a charity to help refugees and migrants; this was his duty he said, for *love has no religion.*

Legendary Pakistani social worker Abdul Sattar Edhi (1928-2016) spent his life caring for victims of violence. His last words were *mere mulk ke gharibon ka khayal rakhna*

In 2019, the Sicilian fishermen Carlo and Gaspare Giarratano risked prison to save 50 Libyan refugees from a sinking boat. They said it was their duty, because *no human would turn away.*

In 1968, Daniel and Philip Berrigan (a decorated soldier in the Second World War) were the first Catholic priests to receive jail sentences in America for their opposition to the Vietnam war: they raided a recruitment centre and burnt documents. Their statement read: *'We confront the Catholic Church, other Christian bodies and the synagogues of America with their silence and cowardice in the face of our country's crimes. Our apologies, good friends, for the fracture of good order, the burning of paper instead of children, the angering of the orderlies in the front parlour of the charnel house. We could not, so help us God, do otherwise. For we are sick at heart, our hearts give us no rest for thinking of the Land of Burning Children.'*

All these noble souls are living examples of the oceanic circle. Neither religion nor nationality have a place here. They are not remembered much, nor are their stories taught in history lessons. And there are thousands of them whom we do not know.

Gandhi considered history to be a story of rupture, a record of conflict. There was no point looking for love and soul-force in history, he said, for *'you cannot expect silver ore in a tin mine.'* He refused to accept either the 'laws of history' or the inevitability of violent conflict. Commenting on questions by a correspondent in America in 1926, he

wrote: *If we are to make progress, we must not repeat history but make new history... If we may make new discoveries and inventions in the phenomenal world, must we declare our bankruptcy in the spiritual domain?* (CWMG; v 30, p 415)

Gandhi rebelled against the tidal wave of history. He confronted it head on. What do the above examples signify, if not the human capacity to extend love and friendship to strangers? Is not this capacity an essential means to overcome endless conflict?

The Oceanic circle

The expanding circle has been an age-old symbol in human culture. The circle marks the true infinity, which has neither beginning nor end. In its mode of outward expansion, it must begin with that which is nearest; and grow until it merges with humanity. This is not a dream of imperial domination, but of solidarity. This is how Gandhi conceived it:

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. (CWMG v 85, p 33; July 28, 1946)

Gandhi's wisdom signifies an alternative way of addressing the world's problems: from ecological ones to the problem of permanent wars and conflict. He was a patriot, but not a nationalist in the narrow sense: that is the meaning we get from his wish: *'my province must be co-extensive with the Indian boundary so that ultimately it extends to the boundary of the earth. Else it perishes.'* The oceanic circle was not invented by him, it was already always there. Gandhi reminded us to look at it again.

In the twilight of British power in India, political groups threw away the available chances of mutual accommodation. Gandhi spoke of love and mutual respect in the midst of hatred and carnage. Some were pessimists even when there was hope. Gandhi gave people hope in the midst of despair; he appealed to their better instincts at the worst of times. He did not give humble Indians their dignity, he reminded them of it. He did not give us our capacity for friendship and communal harmony, he reminded us of it. This was the message of his last fast in January 1948. It is a message from a man of extraordinary goodness, strength and courage.

Nearly three thousand years ago the thinker Heraclitus spoke of the soul thus: *You could not search out the furthest limits of the soul, even if you traversed all of the ways, so unfathomable is its logos*. Gandhi's soul is indeed unfathomable. He resembles the moral pilgrim of Plato's cave, who ascends towards the light in search of knowledge, and returns to his fellow human beings to tell them what he has seen. Let us remember that for him, the most important journey was the journey within. His fast in Calcutta in 1947 demonstrates his capacity to move the consciences even of persons who had committed violent crimes. As also those of the English and Anglo-Indian policemen who wore black arm-bands in solidarity with the British Empires' most steadfast opponent. When the violence began to end, he insisted it was God's work. When pious ladies wished to perform a puja in thanks, he asked them to sell the *saamagri* and distribute the money to the poor. What was his message, they asked: My life is my message, he replied.

Albert Einstein famously said of Gandhi, that generations to come would 'scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.' It is less well-known that a global poll conducted in 2000 by readers of the BBC News website voted Mahatma Gandhi the greatest man of the past thousand years.

In October 1947, All-India Radio arranged a special broadcast on his birthday, and requested him to listen. He declined, saying he preferred *rentio* (the flat spinning wheel) to radio. The hum of the spinning-wheel was sweeter. He heard in it, he said, the '*still sad music of humanity*'. The spinning wheel was a small wooden circle; but the worldwide outpouring of grief upon news of his assassination amplified the sound of the *rentio*.

Gandhi's oceanic circle had embraced the global population.

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